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in favor of the social gospel, as now seems inevitable, organized religion will not thereby stand committed to any special program of economic or political reform; but the church will cease to be the handmaid of a dreary and selfish individualism and will be not only a place of worship but a center for the discussion of civic righteousness; while the Scriptures will again become the symbol of a new popular awakening.

We see more and more clearly, then, that the religion of the Bible is not a musty antiquity. It is a fresh, living organism of developing thought which covers the ages and unites the present with the past. Under various forms, Amorite influence has been allied successively with polytheism, with dogmatism, and with individualism. We know that the process of evolution will go on as religious experience continues to unfold within the awakening church and the Spirit of God moves upon the face of history. The rapt vision of the

Hebrew seer beheld the Divine Marcher coming up from the wilderness and setting forth on his long journey through the centuries:

Who is this that cometh from Edom,
With dyed garments from Bozrah?
This that is glorious in his apparel,
Marching in the greatness of his strength?

*I that speak in righteousness,
Mighty to save.*

Wherefore art thou red in thine apparel,
And thy garments like him that treadeth
the winevat?

*I have trodden the winepress alone;
And of the peoples there was no man
with me.
Yea, I trod them in mine anger,
And trampled them in my wrath;
And their lifeblood is sprinkled upon my
garments,
And I have stained all my raiment.
For the day of vengeance was in my heart,
And the year of my redeemed is come.*

THE AUTHORITY OF A RELIGIOUS CONSCIOUSNESS

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Our attention has already been drawn to the fact (by J. B. Pratt in his *Psychology of Religious Belief*) that there are three stages through which people pass in the development of their religious beliefs. The earliest of these is the stage of credulity. It belongs to child life and

is there strongly in evidence. Credulity being one of children's chief characteristics, it is not surprising that the child should accept its religious belief with the same credulous faith as it accepts everything else it is told. These beliefs it receives without any serious misgivings.

It may occasionally ask a few questions, but whatever weak doubts may sporadically be expressed are soon dispersed. For the child places implicit trust in its mother's veracity and superior wisdom; it is sufficient that she says so. The child accepts its religious belief on her authority, for, passing through and belonging to the stage of credulity, it is credulous in its attitude toward all things, religious teaching not excepted.

When a child comes to its teens, however, it is not quite so credulous. Doubts arise and take possession of its growing mind. The child begins to do a little thinking for itself and when it finds certain facts, given to it on authority, hard to harmonize with experience the first signs of intellectual rebellion appear. The writer of *The Promised Land* tells of a disconcerting discovery she herself made as a child. She had been told that if she did a certain thing on the Sabbath blindness would befall her. Arriving at the critical age when the authority of elders is beginning to be doubted she decided on trying the experiment. To her utter astonishment nothing happened. When such disclosures occur, the falsity of authority being viewed in the light of experience, there is invariably a revolt against authority of every description. Having been found false in one particular, how can authority be trusted in other matters, and, if untrue, why should it be binding? Experience, and doubts arising therefrom, does much toward developing the critical faculty. A fight for intellectual freedom begins. The stage of credulity has passed. Reverence for and obedience to authority are on the wane; a struggle for intellectual liberty has begun.

But the process in the development of our religious beliefs does not end there. Another stage is at length reached, viz., the stage of religious feeling. The teaching drilled into us in childhood is not so easily forgotten or suppressed. Was it not Cardinal Newman who said, "Give me the children till they reach their teens and you can do with them what you like after that"? "It has taken me a lifetime," remarked an elderly lady in the present writer's hearing a short time ago, "to unlearn what I learned as a child." Some of the teachings of our childhood days are "the ghosts that will not down"; they persist in haunting us throughout our remaining days. The critical period does not destroy religious beliefs though it may change them almost beyond recognition. The reasoning of the adolescent age does not uproot them. As we emerge into mature life we find the religious beliefs of an earlier age reappearing in the form of religious feelings—feelings which no reasoning can destroy—feelings which may not be unreasonable but are for the most part supra-reasonable.

And what takes place in the development of religious belief in the individual has also taken place in the development of the religious faith of Christianity. The history of the Christian church in the Western world bears evidence of having passed through these three distinct stages of religious belief. Up to the sixteenth century the church was the sole recognized authority of religious life. The Christian world was passing through its stage of credulity. Its adolescent period had not yet arrived. Men accepted their religious beliefs at the hands, and on the authority, of the church. The age of critical inquiry had not yet

come. True, there were exceptions, for no movement is the result of the hour. The widespread intellectual revolt against the abusive authority of the Roman church during the sixteenth century had had many precursors. Individuals had not failed to express their misgivings nor had there been lacking numerous small groups who had protested against the misused power of papal authority. Nevertheless, it is not till we reach the Reformation period that we find free exercise of the critical faculty. The second stage in the development of religious belief had been reached. A struggle for untrammelled intellectual freedom was in process. There was a general revolt against ecclesiastical control; the authority of the church was defied. In effect the leaders of the Reformation said, "Up till now our goodness has been of necessity and not of free will. Henceforth what goodness we may assert shall be subject only to our private judgment in so far as that judgment harmonizes with the Scriptures. What authority we do recognize will be that of the Bible because it appeals to our reasons as being truer and more reliable than papal authority." And with what results was that declaration followed? All manner of intellectual misgivings arose which divided the protesting ranks into a thousand and one petty parties. Protestantism had been born out of a revolt against ecclesiastical authority and out of a desire for intellectual freedom. Once this liberation occurred, all manner of doubts were born and disseminated. An age of skepticism set in. The rationalism of the eighteenth was followed by the materialism of the nineteenth century. The critical spirit with its doubts and

unbeliefs—characteristic of all adolescence was here in evidence; skepticism was the order of the day.

But in the development of its religious beliefs, the Western world had not as yet reached its final stage. As in the case of the individual, the age of intellectual misgivings was followed by that of religious feeling. For is it not true that while the age of materialism has gone (a truism never seriously questioned in this day) religious feeling is today much alive in the heart of our Western life? That which had been taught during the childhood years of Western civilization intellectual misgivings failed to destroy. Our religious beliefs were too well grounded for that. Benjamin Kidd very vividly presents to his readers in his *Social Evolution* the validity of this fact. Conceiving a person from another planet coming to earth and studying the Christian religion, such a person being free from all preconceived ideas regarding the subject in hand, he gives it as his opinion that, among the many strange discoveries he would make from his investigation of the religious phenomena of our Western civilization, not the least would be the bitter struggle that has existed between science and religion during modern times. This is what he would find:

Everywhere he would find him [the Christian], clinging with the most extraordinary persistence to ideas and ideals which regulated his life under the influence of these religions, and ruthlessly punishing all those who endeavoured to convince him that these conceptions were without foundation in fact. At many periods in human history also, he would have to observe that the opinion had been entertained by a considerable number of persons, that a point had at

length been reached at which it was only a question of time until human reason finally dispelled the belief in those unseen powers which man held in control over himself. But he would find this anticipation never realized. Dislodged from one position, the human mind, he would observe, had only taken up another of the same kind which it continued once more to hold with the same unreasoning, dogged and desperate persistence.

Yes, as a civilization we have passed through our adolescent period of intellectual misgivings and emerged into our maturity with our religious beliefs undestroyed. Only instead of their taking the form of implicit credulity or inflexible convictions grounded in reasoning, they have survived in the form of a strong religious feeling secure in the heart of Christendom. Our own age is evidence of the fact that man is "incurably religious."

But the tendency of mankind has always been, and still is, to recognize authority of some kind for its guidance. We may even say it is one of man's peculiar weaknesses. When he makes assertions he invariably—save the exceptionally strong-minded or egotistical person—loves to be able to back up his statements by referring to some recognized authority. And it is similarly true of his actions; he loves to refer to some precedent in justification of his deeds. A lawyer seeks to strengthen his argument by citing the largest possible number of cases tried at higher tribunals. Even the founders of our nation, after having fought at tremendous sacrifice for liberty, turned, in making their national constitution, to older institutions for guidance. Man feels his positions to

be all the more secure and valid when recognized authority is behind them.

What then shall we say of religious feeling as representing the stage at which we have arrived in the development of religious belief? Does it acknowledge any authority or has religious life no longer need of any authoritative power to spur it on to action? Or is religious consciousness sufficiently strong to be an authority unto itself?

It is not true to say that at the Reformation all external authority was abandoned. While the right of intellectual freedom was claimed in the use of private judgment, liberty was curtailed by acknowledging the external and supreme authority of the Scriptures; for conduct it was the recognized "rule of faith." All that occurred at the Reformation was for its leaders to substitute one external authority for another—a change which, however, was preferred because it appealed to reason as being more trustworthy and true. But during recent years the authority of the Scriptures has been considerably weakened. Since the rise of the modern methods of biblical criticism the faith of Protestant people has been tremendously shaken in the Old Book as worthy of implicit trust in matters of conduct. The numerous and varied opinions of biblical scholars have appeared so confusing and conflicting to those untrained in the modern methods of biblical approach that they have found it difficult to determine what or what not to accept of the Bible as authoritative and binding. Consequently religious belief has been thrown back very largely upon religious feeling as its sole source of authority. We find, therefore, that we have at the present

time four distinct classes of Christian believers. There are those who still accept the external authority of the church. Obviously, we refer to Roman Catholic communicants whose religious beliefs rest entirely on ecclesiastical authority. Then we have those who take the external authority of the Scriptures as their "rule of faith," the religious beliefs of numerous Protestant people still being determined by biblical teachings exclusively. These acknowledge no authority for the guidance of their religious life other than the Word of God. A third class is found in those comparatively few Christians who try to regulate what they believe by the internal authority of personal and accumulated reasoning. They eliminate from their religious beliefs all that cannot be made to harmonize with reason. They persistently stand for the right of private judgment. What they believe is accepted on the external authority of neither church nor Scripture. They put the dogmas of the church and the doctrines of scholars to the test of mental criticism, rejecting or accepting them just as they appeal or fail to appeal to their common-sense. This class of believers is an almost negligible minority. The life and beliefs of the majority of Protestant people rest solely on religious consciousness. And it is not surprising that it should be so. At the Reformation, Protestants repudiated once and forever the external authority of the church. While for a time the authority of the Scriptures was held to be binding, there is no gainsaying the fact that its power to dictate to the Protestant conscience has decidedly weakened during recent years. Nor have we far to look for its causes. So

numerous have been the sects and doctrines resulting from a literal interpretation of Scriptures that experience has been led to doubt the trustworthiness of the Bible as a guide to religious belief. When we add to this the great variety of interpretations given to once unquestioned passages—interpretations which have been far from generally accepted and have not infrequently resulted in bitter controversies—we can at least partially understand why the authority of Scripture has lost some of that peremptory power exercised by it at an earlier age in the regulation of Christian faith and conduct. On the other hand, reason has been found so fickle and reasonings so multifarious and diverse that by most Christians it has been rejected as too unstable for its conclusions to be accepted as binding. Consequently the bulk of present-day Protestants are thrown back upon religious consciousness as the only source of authority for religious beliefs and activities. And what are the results as evidenced? Has religious consciousness proved sufficiently strong to be an authority unto itself? Protestant people have demanded the right of perfect freedom to follow their religious convictions unharassed by an external interference. They have repudiated that goodness which is of necessity and have claimed for themselves a goodness characterized by the liberty of free will. But what is the nature and extent of goodness that rests on such a basis? What says experience? How many children would attend school if it were a matter of personal choice rather than being compulsory? How much money would enter our city, county, state, and national treasuries

were it left to the free will of individual taxpayers? How much more lawlessness, immorality, and vice would exist than does exist were there no state laws? How much lower would be the standard of private conduct were the pressure and authority of public opinion removed? How much of our goodness is of free will and how much of necessity? As viewed in the light of voluntary conduct we are able to see the greatness of the problem Protestantism is facing. Not that the difficulties and perils involved are peculiar to the Protestant church. For it is a problem every voluntary movement has to meet. Social, industrial, and political leaders are similarly hampered by the lethargy of the respective people they are seeking to guide. Wherever you have voluntarily organized life it is always questionable whether the particular social, industrial, or patriotic consciousness is sufficiently strong to respond to the claims laid upon its members. Where external authority is entirely absent and goodness is placed upon the sole basis of free will there is always the danger of an excessive claim to liberty threatening the very life of its own organization, consciousness proving too weak to be authoritative unto itself. This is one of the present-day perils of Protestantism. Protestants have repudiated all external interference. They have claimed the right of full and perfect liberty; but it is very questionable whether or not the religious consciousness of the Protestant church is strong enough to insure for the future that which reasonably should be expected of it. Has not its very claim to liberty been the pretext under which all manner of license has been indulged, which leads

one to wonder whether the Protestant consciousness is sufficiently developed to warrant freedom from all external authority? It is, indeed, a serious question whether at the present stage of its development the religious consciousness of Protestantism has sufficient strength to rise voluntarily to the demands made of it; whether in the days to come it will be able to meet the expectation of the world, and be equal to those responsibilities upon which its very existence hangs.

Any conclusion arrived at regarding these questions must necessarily take into account the part religious consciousness has played, and is playing, in the regulation of Christian activities; for it is on the facts of the present that we must build our hopes for the future. Nor is the testimony wholly discouraging, though it is not all that could be desired. Limitation of space forbids an attempt to account for all evidence that might be produced; mention of three phases, and those but briefly, must suffice.

Personal conduct has not wholly been left untouched and uninfluenced by the religious consciousness of our age. Neither does it seem to have suffered to any alarming extent by discarding the external authority of ecclesiasticism. The private conduct of the average Protestant Christian will stand favorable comparison with that of the average Roman Catholic. The Protestants' relegation of papal authority does not appear to have caused irreparable loss in matters relative to Christian living. Yet while the growing religious consciousness has constantly been raising the standard of Christian ethics, nevertheless there re-

mains much to be desired. Tremendous disparity continues between religious profession and living. Protestants have either persistently ignored the authority of religious consciousness in matters of personal conduct or religious consciousness has not proved sufficiently strong to be authoritative and for its dictates to be recognized as peremptory. After the elapse of nearly twenty centuries we find the principles of the Nazarene but faintly translated into human action. Religious consciousness, while it has insisted on the maintenance of a true and unbroken relationship between God and man, has very largely failed in causing a Christlike relationship to be recognized and maintained among men in their relations to each other. In commercial, industrial, political, and social life the authority of a religious consciousness does not appear to be very strong, nor its dictates to be very widely accepted. Nevertheless its acclamations are more clearly heard today than ever before, and an ever-growing attention is being given to its commands with the passing of the days. No one will gainsay that in matters of personal conduct, which relate to the larger social life of which the unit is a part, the authority of a religious consciousness is being more keenly felt and increasingly obeyed.

And what is true of private is equally true of collective religious conduct. While the religious life of Protestantism, viewed as an aggregation, compares favorably with the life of those religious bodies recognizing ecclesiastical authority—and the loss, if any, accruing from the discarding of papal dictatorship, does not appear serious—there is much to be desired of Protestant consciousness by

way of united effort. The aggregate religious consciousness of Protestantism, as in the case of individual consciousness, apparently proves too frail to provide for itself an authority whose laws would be universally accepted as inviolable. In facing public evils the religious consciousness of the Protestant church has invariably failed to procure the united effort required. Ever and anon there has been a call for undivided support in attacking the wrongs of society. Social injustices, political corruptions, and industrial iniquities have called for the united aggressive action of the church to abolish them. The worth of such action religious leaders have not failed to recognize and have intermittently appealed to the Protestant conscience and consciousness for single action. In no given instance has a universally united effort been made in response to their appeals. In matters demanding collective action the religious consciousness of Protestantism has proved ineffective. Evidently it remains too weak, where undivided effort is required, to be an authority unto itself.

In their attitude toward the organized life of which they are a part, however, Protestants do not compare so favorably with those who still continue to recognize the external authority of the church. Here the authority of religious consciousness appears painfully incompetent. And it is precisely at this point that one of the gravest perils of Protestantism is to be found. Organized religion, as found in the Protestant churches, has been characterized by a laxity of loyalty. The religious consciousness of Protestant people has proved very deficient for providing an authority sufficient to assure

unswerving fidelity to the various branches of its organized activities. The respective loyalty of the two great branches of the Western Christian church toward their separate religious organizations will scarcely bear comparison. The facts are almost too obvious for mention. One need only instance the effort, and often sacrificial effort, made by numerous Roman Catholic people to attend early Sunday morning mass, as compared with the indifference of Protestants toward maintaining the Sabbath-day services where inconvenience or self-denial is required by attendance to put beyond doubt the intended meaning. But we are told the goodness of Catholicism is of necessity and therefore of little value, while the goodness of Protestant people is of the greatest value because voluntarily performed, even though its quantity is less. Lack of loyalty is never justifiable, and one of the most serious questions that the organized life of Protestantism has to meet is whether the authority of its religious consciousness is sufficiently strong to guarantee its future existence as a healthy, progressive, and aggressive organization. Of course it all depends on whether Protestantism believes its organized life as represented by the churches is worth preserving or not. If the churches are conceived as no longer necessary as a medium through which Protestant vitality may find expression, then loyalty to them is no longer required. But if Protestant conviction decides in favor of the churches as essential to the preservation of Protestantism, then it becomes a vital question. The continuance of church organization being considered not

only necessary but essential for the preservation of Protestant principles in this age, loyalty should not merely be expected but demanded of religious consciousness. For Protestantism is never secure, nor can it ever be, till it recognizes an authority equally as binding as the external authority of the Roman Catholic church is for its own communicants—an authority which is not of necessity but of free will, being voluntarily accepted by every child of its faith. The only possible authority Protestantism can accept being that of its own religious consciousness, if consciousness is too weak to be an authority unto itself, then great is its peril. And that that danger exists there is no denying, for the evidence clearly testifies to the fact that Protestants either do not recognize as imperative the dictates of their own religious consciousness in their attitudes toward the organized church, or else that consciousness is too impotent to be felt. Protestantism's claim to liberty has caused its adherents to degenerate into a set of religious anarchists who accept little as binding upon them. Few duties or responsibilities are taken seriously or as compulsory. Obligations can be shirked, and who has the right to interfere? Membership may be continued even though the smallest possible interest is taken in the working of the various branches of the church's organized life. Official duties may be thrown aside because of some petty grievance without the least thought of disloyalty having been practiced. Here is wherein lies one of the great perils of Protestantism. The lack of recognized authority in the governing of its various activities menaces its very

existence. Numerous professing Protestants claim for themselves a liberty which they would not for one moment tolerate outside of the church. Such license exercised in the social and moral sphere would immediately be viewed as anarchy and attacked as dangerous to public safety. They fail to recognize the peril of the same spirit when it is present in the religious life of the church. But until we come to accept the authority of religious consciousness as inviolably binding, Protestantism is far from being secure nor is its future assured.

In those words of Jesus, as a lad of twelve, in answer to his parents, who inquired of him why he had caused them so much sorrowful anxiety by remaining behind in Jerusalem, we have the key to his whole career and a fine example of fidelity to the authority of religious consciousness. "Wist ye not," he replied, "that I must be about my Father's business?" It is in those words "I must" that we have the secret of his conduct. Jesus, as far as we know, never felt himself to be under any external ecclesiastical obligation. He bowed to no priestly authority. He was under no compulsion from without. His goodness was entirely that of free will. And yet, he was bound to an authority more binding than the command of any priest or church. Within his own soul was heard clear and loud that divine imperative "I must"—the authority of a fully developed religious consciousness—which he never failed to obey.

We have Paul writing to the Corinthian church, "Of the Jews five times

received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once I was stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day have I been in the deep; in journeyings often, in perils of rivers, in perils of robbers, in perils of mine own race, in perils from the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils of the wilderness . . . in weariness and painfulness; in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness." "You were a fool, Paul. If that was the kind of treatment you received and those were the things you suffered and endured for the gospel's sake, why didn't you give it up?" "Give it up, did you say, give it up? Ah! how often I should have liked to give it up, but I couldn't, for the love of Christ constrained me." Yes, this is the nature of the authority we must recognize, feel, and obey, even the authority of a strong, fully developed religious consciousness. "For this is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord: I will put my laws into their mind, and on their heart also will I write them." Within our own souls must be heard the voice of the divine imperative speaking forth those dictates which shall be more authoritative and binding than the external authority of either church or priest. For only a recognition of, and loyalty to, the authority of a strong religious consciousness is able to transform private and collective religious conduct, raising the standards of religious living ever nearer to the standard of our Lord, and is able to insure the future life of the Protestant church.